

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

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MEDIA ADVISORY NO.2

COAST GUARD RECALLS HOUSEBOATS DUE TO CARBON MONOXIDE HAZARD AND CAUTIONS OWNERS/OPERATORS ON DANGERS

On February 23, the Coast Guard began issuing mandatory recall notices to houseboat manufacturers who may have built vessels equipped with swim platforms and electrical generator exhaust systems vented into a stern cavity. This design has been found to permit lethal concentrations of carbon monoxide to build up in the vicinity of the swim platform. The directed recall was addressed to those houseboat manufacturers who had not responded to the Coast Guard's December 21, 2000 letter notifying them of this design defect, which has been linked to a large number of carbon monoxide [CO] poisonings. Six houseboat manufacturers have agreed to voluntarily recall all of their boats with the design problem.

Captain Ron Weston, Chief of the Coast Guard Office of Boating Safety, stressed, "The Coast Guard will leave no stone unturned. We are committed to eliminating this safety defect."

"We have made the manufacturer's aware of the problem, and that venting the generator exhaust through the vessel's side is an approved solution. We expect them to correct the problem quickly. We are in the process of insuring that absolutely all U.S. houseboat manufacturers are aware of this potentially lethal construction design and that they immediately take steps to correct it on boats they built," Captain Weston said.

The Coast Guard noted two major manufacturers, Somerset Custom Houseboat Inc. and Stardust Cruiser Inc. responded quickly to its December 21 letter and are actively engaged in correcting the problem. The six manufacturers conducting voluntary recalls intend to correct all of their boats with this design defect—notwithstanding the fact that the Coast Guard cannot require them to correct boats over five years old. The companies are cooperating with the Coast Guard to assure that all owners with houseboats with this design are notified of the recall.

Since it will take time to complete the necessary corrections, the Coast Guard invites the media to join with them and the Department of Interior in publicizing this recall. The Coast Guard emphasizes that all boat owners/operators should be alerted to the dangers of carbon monoxide, and any owner of a houseboat with the defective design (see the attached diagram) should exercise special care until the manufacturer corrects the problem.

THE COAST GUARD CAUTIONS HOUSEBOAT OPERATORS

If your houseboat has a swim platform and its electrical generator vents through the transom into a stern cavity, do not run your generator when not underway, if someone is swimming in the rear area or sitting on the stern deck.

Dangerous levels of carbon monoxide collect beneath the swim platform or above the stern on those houseboats with this design (see attached diagram). Recent data provided the Coast Guard by the Department of Interior and National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) reveals that the carbon monoxide hazard is greatest when these houseboats are not underway and their electrical generators are running. This safety advisory is in effect until owners or manufacturers have an opportunity to correct the design of the generator system on these vessels. The data from a study at Lake Powell, Arizona, yielded the preliminary evidence supporting the need for the Coast Guard to take action. {See attached background}

Due to the inherent risk presented by CO in engine exhaust, the Coast Guard recommends that all houseboat owners/operators with swim platforms take steps to ensure the safety of anyone swimming by keeping them away from any area where exhaust is vented. Also, owners should contact the manufacturer of their houseboat, if they have any questions concerning the applicability of this recall to their houseboat, or if their houseboat has this design and they have not been contacted by the manufacturer.

The Coast Guard's News Web site at www.uscg.mil/news is linked to the Office of Boating Safety's web site at www.uscgboating.org and the Department of Interior's website at <http://safetynet.smis.doi.gov/cohouseboats.htm>. Besides providing valuable information regarding CO and houseboats, these links provide other safety information.

BACKGROUND:

In September 2000, the Coast Guard received information from a Department of Interior and NIOSH study that provided important data about concentrations of carbon monoxide (CO) associated with various houseboat designs. The study was conducted at Lake Powell, Arizona, due to a number of deaths and injuries there thought to be caused by CO poisoning. The study indicated that dangerous and even lethal levels of CO collect in a cavity beneath the swim platforms and above the stern deck on certain model houseboats when the vessels are not underway and the electrical generator is running.

Participants in the study include Dr. Robert Baron, National Park Service Medical Director for the Glenn Canyon National Recreational Area/Lake Powell; Ranger Steve Luckesen, National Park Service; Industrial Hygienist Mr. Tim Radtke, Department of Interior; Ms. Jane McCammon, carbon monoxide expert for the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health; and others. Through their perseverance and dedication, these individuals were able to finally attribute a number of deaths on Lake Powell that were previously reported as drowning accidents to CO poisoning.

The study showed the most dangerous concentrations were associated with houseboats that are equipped with swim platforms and electrical generator exhaust systems that vent through the transom/rear panel into a cavity formed by the vessel's rear deck area. The study demonstrated that CO emissions could induce severe CO poisoning in exposed outside areas. Previously it was thought that CO emissions were primarily a problem that affected cabins or enclosed spaces on boats.

The Coast Guard has determined that the evidence from the Lake Powell study established a substantial potential for injury to the public due to this particular design and was indicative of a national problem. Therefore, it issued a letter on December 21 requesting that all manufacturers of houseboats with the defective design to contact the Coast Guard and identify the number of affected vessels manufactured. In addition, they were asked to provide a solution for the problem, describe their plan for correcting the problem on boats already sold and those to be constructed as well as their plan for notifying owners/operators.

Captain Ron Weston, Chief of the Coast Guard's Boating Safety Office, stressed, "The effort of these individuals is truly significant. They were able to link external carbon monoxide poisoning to a number of deaths previously reported as drownings on Lake Powell. This is an important contribution to public safety. It reflects a dedication that we in the Coast Guard greatly appreciate. Public service and protecting the public is what the Coast Guard is all about, and clearly that is what these individuals and all those that assisted them are about. They worked long and hard to identify the true cause of these tragic deaths. They deserve both our appreciation and gratitude for what they have accomplished."

"The Department of Interior is continuing to assist the Coast Guard in getting the safety message out. This will help us reach a broad base of the recreational boating public. With the media's help, delivery of this important safety message can be expanded significantly," Weston said.

Weston concluded, "The Coast Guard cannot stress enough how valuable the cooperation of the various agencies and concerned manufacturers has been. Preventing mishaps is an essential investment that is equal in importance to our investments in emergency response capabilities. This is truly the goal of everyone dedicated to the health, safety, and welfare of the public."

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For more information see websites at:
www.uscgboating.org...www.uscg.mil/news
<http://safetynet.smis.doi.gov/cohouseboats.htm>